

Character Class

Archivist -- Magical Scholar

by Skip Williams



The archivist from *Heroes of Horror* offers unique challenges and rewards no matter what style of play you favor. Your archivist might be a bookish spellcaster struggling to find practical ways to put her esoteric knowledge to use, a fearless crusader for truth and justice, a master of forgotten lore, a detective, a greedy tomb robber, or almost anything else you can dream up.

Assets

An archivist casts divine spells, primarily from the cleric spell list, and that makes her powerful indeed. An archivist also receives a package of useful class features that make her a boon to any party facing things that go bump in the night. Here's an overview:

- **High Skill Points:** An archivist receives four skill points per level. That's not enough to make the character particularly skillful all by itself; however, archivists tend to have high Intelligence scores. Intelligence governs the archivist's spellcasting and also helps her use her dark knowledge class feature. With extra skill points from a high Intelligence score, an archivist usually has plenty of skill points to spend.
- **Good Fortitude and Will Saves:** An archivist uses the best progression for Fortitude and Will saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). This helps the archivist resist most effects that attack her mind or body.
- **Divine Spells:** The archivist casts divine spells, mostly from the cleric class list. Because these are divine spells, they are not subject to failure from armor worn. The cleric spell list contains powerful and useful spells. Many of these spells are medicinal in nature. Such spells can literally save your life or an ally's life, and using them during adventures can make you popular with your group. The cleric spell list also includes defensive spells that protect you or your allies from various hazards or attacks, a few offensive spells that can defeat or impair foes, and many utilitarian spells that reveal information or provide useful abilities. Unlike a cleric, however, an archivist must maintain a book of spells (called a prayer book), which tends to limit her spell selection somewhat (see below). Though an archivist begins play with access only to the cleric spell list, the archivist can add divine spells from other class lists (for example, druid spells, ranger spells, or paladin spells) to her prayer book when she finds them on scrolls. The rules don't say so, but it's reasonable to allow an archivist to learn new divine spells from another archivist's prayer book.
- **Dark Knowledge:** An archivist makes a detailed study of all that is rotten and evil in the world. Beginning at 1st level, an archivist can put her knowledge to special use by making a Knowledge check. If the check succeeds, the archivist grants her allies some benefit against foes of the aberration, elemental, magical beast, outsider, or undead types. To use this power, the archivist needs the appropriate Knowledge skill -- for example,

Knowledge (dungeoneering) to use the power against aberrations. If the archivist makes a DC 15 Knowledge check, she imparts a basic advantage to her allies. If the check result exceeds DC 15 by 10 points, the advantage is slightly more potent. If the check result exceeds DC 15 by 20 points, the advantage is even more potent. Best of all, using your dark knowledge power requires only a move action, which means you can use it and still do something else significant (such as attack or cast a spell) during the same round.

As the archivist gains levels, she gains additional dark knowledge powers and can draw on this ability more often each day. The power works three times a day at 1st level -- after that, the archivist gains an extra daily use every three levels (at 3rd, 6th, 9th, 12th, 15th, and 18th levels).

At 1st level, the archivist has knowledge of tactics and can grant allies an attack roll bonus against foes.

At 5th level, the archivist has knowledge of corrupting influences and can grant allies a saving throw bonus against foes.

At 8th level, the archivist has knowledge of physical vulnerabilities and can grant allies the ability to deal extra damage to foes.

At 11th level, the archivist has knowledge of dread secrets that can impair or disable creatures.

At 14th level, the archivist can anticipate a creature's attacks and impart an Armor Class bonus to allies.

- **Bonus Feats:** An archivist gains Scribe Scroll as a bonus feat at 1st level. The archivist can select additional bonus feats from a short list at 10th and 20th level.
- **Lore Mastery:** At 2nd level, an archivist gains a +2 bonus on Decipher Script checks and to all checks with one Knowledge skill of her choice. At 7th, 13th, and 17th level, the archivist chooses an additional Knowledge skill to gain the +2 bonus. This is particularly helpful in conjunction with the archivist's dark knowledge power.
- **Still Mind:** At 4th level, an archivist gains a +2 bonus on saving throws against enchantment effects, making her mind even better protected against outside influences.

Weaknesses

The archivist's spellcasting abilities and other powers come at a price. Here are a few things you'll consider when thinking about an archivist character:

- **Restricted Spell Selection:** As noted earlier, an archivist must keep a prayer book that contains all the spells she can prepare and cast. Compared to a cleric, any one archivist can use only a small slice of the cleric spell list (that portion she can manage to write into her prayer book). An archivist has some ability to poach spells from other divine spellcasters' class spell lists, but doing so takes time and money. The archivist also has access only to the basic cleric class spell list, not to the cleric's often potent domain spells.
- **Restricted Skill Selection:** Archivists have plenty of skill points to spend; however, the class skill list proves fairly narrow. The list focuses on learning , spellcasting, and investigation. To get the most out of your dark knowledge power, you need to invest many skill points into several knowledge skills. If you maximize your dark knowledge power, you won't have many skill points left for other useful skills.

- **Fairly Low Hit Points:** The archivist gains 6-sided hit dice, which produces a reasonable hit point total, but not one that allows the archivist to withstand the rigors of front-line combat.
- **Weak Armor Class:** The archivist is proficient with light and medium armor but not with shields. This allows the archivist a moderately good Armor Class -- only good enough to fend off attacks from petty opponents.
- **Poor Attack Bonus:** An archivist's base attack bonus is +1 per two levels, which is the worst in the game. Archivists don't do well with physical attacks. With her weak hit points, weak Armor Class, and low attack bonus, an archivist can fend off the occasional physical attack but can't function as a front-line combatant, at least not for long.
- **Poor Reflex Saves:** Archivists have the worst progression for Reflex saves (see Table 3-1 in the *Player's Handbook*). Archivists aren't so great at avoiding attacks that fill areas or deal damage directly to their bodies.

Playing a Classy Archivist

People who play great archivists usually follow keep the following in mind:

Plan Ahead

An archivist is a character who has accumulated a great deal of knowledge from books and scholarly exercises, and that should show during play.

You'll make some of your most important decisions long before any adventure begins. Start with your skill selection. Your dark knowledge power depends heavily on how you spend skill points on your Knowledge skills. All the Knowledge skills are class skills for you, but only four of them are relevant to your dark knowledge power -- Arcana (magical beasts), dungeoneering (aberrations), religion (undead), and the planes (elementals and outsiders). You might want to keep all four of these skills maximized (or nearly so), or you might pick and choose which sorts of creatures you'll fight through your dark knowledge power.

You also face an important decision when assembling your prayer book. You choose the spells in your book, and it pays to consider them carefully. As always, it's best if you include a mixture of offensive, defensive, and utility spells. This mix allows you to deal with many different challenges. The cleric spell list is packed with lifesaving spells such as *slow poison*, *neutralize poison*, *remove disease*, and the ever-popular *cure wounds* spells. These are always useful to have, and they'll prove essential if you're the sole divine spellcaster in your party. For attack, include spells such as *magic stone*, *spiritual weapon*, *searing light*, and *flame strike*. Spells such as *blindness/deafness*, the various *inflict wounds* spells, and *bestow curse* can ruin a foe's day. These spells have touch range, however, so using them in combat might entail too much risk for you. Defensive spells such as *entropic shield*, *shield of faith*, and *death ward* can keep you and your allies alive. Keep in mind that your allies are usually your best tools for dealing with an enemy. Your prayer book also should include a few spells that are just plain useful. Divination spells and their relatives fit your archetype as a character who knows and discovers things. Spells such as *detect magic*, the various detect alignment spells, *zone of truth*, *invisibility purge*, *discern lies*, and *scrying* might avert trouble before it starts.

Once you've built your prayer books, you still need to choose spells for each adventure. Try to anticipate what you and your party will need during your adventure and select your spells accordingly.

Stay Near the Action

You don't have the Armor Class or the hit points to lead the way (at least not all the time), but you're not a complete weakling, either. Keep track of what your allies are doing and make sure you're at least in the vicinity when a situation develops. When a fight starts, you'll probably want to use your dark knowledge power, which only works if you're aware of the subject creature. You'll also need to be in the thick of things to use many of your spells effectively.

Remember Your Friends

The spells in your prayer book determine what you can contribute during an adventure. Nevertheless, you and your allies working together will prove more powerful than any of you would be separately.

The Party's Main Fighter: Whoever has to stand in the front line and handle most of the fighting will serve as both your protector and your most potent weapon. Many of the effects you can achieve with your dark knowledge power benefits a fighting character the most, so stick close to this character whenever you can.

If you're the only divine spellcaster in your group, be prepared to support your fighting powerhouse with healing and other curative spells from time to time. A single *cure light wounds* or *cure moderate wounds* spell can keep a fighting character going at a critical time, and indirectly deal more damage to the enemy than any other spell can.

Even if you don't have a prayer book full medicinal spells, be ready to bring your spells to bear on foes your group's main fighter can't handle.

The Party Scout: Stealthy characters who precede the group into the unknown often uncover foes that might prove subject to your dark knowledge power. You probably aren't stealthy enough yourself to accompany the party scouts, but you might want to trail along behind them. You can use your spells as well as dark knowledge to assist the scouts.

Other Spellcasters: It pays to include your party's other spellcasters in your plans when selecting your daily spells. Try to avoid duplicating what those characters do with your spells. You probably have a more limited spell selection than other divine spellcasters in your group. Nevertheless, try to avoid hogging all the flashy spells or depending on other divine spellcasters for workaday spells such as cures and minor divinations.

Arcane spellcasters probably have a wider array of offensive spells available than you have. That doesn't mean you must step aside and let the arcane caster have all the joy of blasting foes to cinders, but it's always a good idea to plan your spell selection so that any offensive spells you

cast compliment or supplement your arcane ally's spells. Sometimes, this is mostly a matter of timing during an encounter. For example, you can use a targeted spell such as *spiritual weapon* or *searing light* to soften up a powerful foe before your group's wizard uses an area spell such as *fireball* (or you might use your spells to pick off survivors after an area spell). On the other hand, it's a waste to drop a single weaker foe (out of a group) with one of your spells if your group's wizard is going to toast them all anyway.

When working with arcane spellcasters, remember that bards and sorcerers have a limited spell selection, so put some effort into making up for gaps in their spell lists with your own spell selections.

Some Key Equipment

Your skills and spells are more important to you than your gear, but a few pieces of the right gear can make your career longer and happier:

- **Prayer Book:** This is the most critical piece of your gear. Guard it well, and keep a copy in a safe place. If you do much wilderness adventuring, you'll need to take your prayer book along with you so you can replenish the spells you use up. If you accumulate a large number of spells, consider traveling with a backup prayer book that contains only the spells you use most often. If you lose it, you can replace it much more cheaply than your main prayer book.
- **Melee Weapon:** You're not much good in combat, but you never know when you'll need to resort to physical weaponry. A spear deals good damage and can prove useful for probing surfaces for unseen dangers. A long spear has reach and can help keep foes a little farther off.
- **Ranged Weapon:** A light crossbow can prove as effective as a low-level attack spell against some opponents. Use it when necessary to conserve your spells when the opposition isn't threatening enough to merit their use.
- **Backup Spells:** You never know when you'll run out of spells, and you never know when you'll need a particular spell and need it very badly. It pays to keep some spellcasting power in reserve on a collection of scrolls or wands or both. Scrolls are a great way to carry along utility spells (such as *comprehend languages*, *augury*, *stone shape*, or *water breathing*) that you might not use every adventure. Best of all, you can make scrolls yourself (though doing so uses up time, money, and experience points). Wands are useful for bread-and-butter spells that you use often, particularly spells that you use on allies such as *bull's strength* or *cure light wounds* or spells that don't allow saving throws, such as *searing light* or *prayer*.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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